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Was Gov. John Leverett a Knight?



New-England Historic, Genealogical Society. *Committee*
on Heraldry.

REPORT

OF ITS

HERALDIC COMMITTEE

ON THE QUESTION

WAS JOHN LEVERETT A KNIGHT?

[Reprint from the New-England Historical and Genealogical Register
for July and October, 1881.]

"Rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man's the man for a' that."

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INTRODUCTION.

THE subject of the following report, now reprinted from the New England Historical and Genealogical Register, if susceptible of indefinite expansion, has been confined, in its present form, to the mooted point submitted to the Heraldic Committee for their consideration. They have studiously avoided whatever might impose an unwelcome task upon their readers, however germane to the inquiry, simply retaining what seemed absolutely indispensable to rendering it intelligible. They could not forget that the magazine is all needed for the material of family history, and has little space to spare for more general topics. The utility of their investigations, moreover, depended upon the accessibility in print of their conclusions, and of the reasons upon which those conclusions were founded, that whoever now or hereafter may care to decide for himself as to their weight, may have them at hand. The utmost brevity, consistent with an adequate statement of the question at issue, essential facts and legitimate arguments, being imperative, that has been their aim.

In its original draught and as presented to the society the report was far more ambitious. It enlarged upon all such details of colonial history during the period that Leverett was engaged in public affairs, upon such prominent measures and men as invested the inquiry with any permanent interest. It recalled to mind much that even the most conversant with our early annals can hardly be expected to keep fresh in their remembrance, that bore on either side of the question. It was thought that whatever brought into view an eventful epoch not

without influence over our existing institutions, was warranted by the broad statement of our late lamented friend Mr. Tuttle, when he proposed the inquiry, and requested that it might be referred to our committee.

The occasion seemed likewise opportune to consider what would have been the probable effect upon our social development, if the crown had exercised its prerogative and bestowed upon leaders in colonial service such titles of honor, as that attached in this instance to the name of Leverett, or others of higher degree. That Charles II. would have gladly assimilated the American colonies to the mother country in this particular, if it would have strengthened his throne or added to his resources, or enabled him to carry out here his Irish policy, cannot reasonably be doubted. He would have gladly introduced feudal tenures, entails and primogeniture, and as a first step towards it did actually call in question the validity of every land grant under the charters. Could he have effected his purpose, wealth and political power, concentrated in a few favored families, would have retarded our growth and deferred our independence. Certainly for many more generations we might have remained in reluctant subjection to a power beyond the sea. The king happily misunderstood the temper of the colonists. The danger was never very great of any such policy succeeding, since exclusive or hereditary privileges were quite inconsistent with the general participation of the whole people in public administration. Nevertheless for a time it menaced, and was never more insidious or more imminent than in the dark days which preceded and followed the abrogation of our colonial charter. Fortunately, stronger men, and wiser than the King or his advisers, baffled his unjust and impolitic schemes, and no one more effectively than Governor Leverett. That such projects were ever in contemplation, and at the very time when arose the complications which led to this historic doubt or historic error, seemed to justify some allusion to them in connection with the consideration of the main question.

Largely of the same races, speaking the same language, reading

the same books, inheriting for centuries a common history, and governed by the same judicial precedents and precepts ; no distinction is more marked between the social and political condition of the land of our fathers and our own, than that while they possess and cherish the most ancient, powerful and respectable aristocracy sanctioned by law that ever existed, we are all as equal and free as the well being and order of the community and the behests of Providence admit. These differences cannot be an uninteresting study. Neither our own history nor that of other nations can be understood without taking them into view. In genealogical investigations, some knowledge of what constituted the several ranks and orders of social life, and what they signified in other lands and ages, is important to prevent mistake, and falls reasonably within our particular province as the Heraldic Committee, that which Mr. Tuttle selected to pass judgment in this special case.

Knighthood, the lowest order of such titular distinction, signified, under the earlier Norman monarchs, the feudal obligation of landed proprietors of forty pounds or more of annual rental to perform military service for the king. In the chivalric days of the later Plantagenets, it was the incentive to deeds of noble daring or their reward. When the Stuarts succeeded to the throne of England, it was bestowed so lavishly and on such unworthy objects as to cease to be an honor, and Leverett had been too long at court to value it. It is different now. The Garter, it is true, once the guerdon of heroic action and able generalship, now decorates reigning sovereigns or the higher nobility, and the Thistle and St. Patrick are confined to Scotch and Irish peers. But the Bath, the Star of India and St. George and St. Michaels, are conferred for merit in letters or science, for public service, civil or military. Such certificates or badges, implying character, education and ability, inspire our respect, and serve their purpose in an Empire to be represented at other courts, and with dependencies to be governed on which the sun never sets. We do not feel the need of any such invidious distinctions here, and the sovereign people, the fountain of honor in America, have other

ways of testifying their approbation of such as do them laudable service.

Our present publication embraces the views of the Editor of the Register, which substantially concur with those of the Committee. His valuable suggestions help more completely to exhaust all that can be said on the subject.*

* See note appended for present British orders of knighthood.

WAS GOV. LEVERETT A KNIGHT ?*

AT the monthly meeting of the New England Historic, Genealogical Society, May 5, 1880, the following letter from Mr. Tuttle was received and read :

LETTER OF CHARLES W. TUTTLE, PH.D.

Boston, May 4, 1880.

DEAR SIR : I have to regret that I shall not be able to attend the meeting of the society to-morrow, as I intended.

For some time I have desired to submit to the consideration of the society a proposition looking to a solution of the question whether John Leverett, governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1673 to 1679, was knighted by Charles II. of England. His knighthood is frequently and solemnly affirmed as an historical fact in the pages of the Leverett Memorial, not excepting the title-page of that volume, as if it were unquestionable.

My impression is that this alleged act of the king never was made public till within fifty years past. At all events, this announcement must have been received with surprise by all who knew the history of the king and of the governor. No one was prepared to believe that Charles II. had any such regard for the Puritan Governor, the aider and abettor of Cromwell—in overthrowing the monarchy—as is implied by conferring on him knighthood, or that the Governor had any such regard for the Cavalier king and his court, as to induce him to accept it. And yet the contrary is urged, among other things, to establish the fact of knighthood.

The affirmative evidence is not strong; it consists of a single letter of business from Mr. Secretary Williamson to Governor Leverett, dated in August, 1676, wherein the latter is styled a knight in the address; and also a document, now missing or lost, supposed to be the royal letters patent conferring this distinction. Strange this letter, wherein no mention is made of knighthood, except as it appears to the Governor's name in the address,

* "New England Historical and Genealogical Register" for July, 1881, pp. 172-5.

should be preserved, and the important bulky Letters Patent creating him knight should be lost.

This is a novel way of conferring as well as proving title to knighthood. As to the letter, no one who knows what a great blunderer the secretary was regarding American affairs and history, will attach any importance to that. How came the secretary, before and after, to forget that the Governor was a knight? If this method of proving right to a title were allowable, one might easily prove, from his files of letters, a title as high as he might choose to lay claim, and as various as his fancy could desire. How often does blunder or design compliment us in a letter, with a title wholly inapplicable and foreign to ourselves!

The negative evidence is strongly against this theory of knighthood in 1676, or any other year in the reign of Charles II.

During my historical researches concerning the conquest of Acadia by the Dutch in 1674, I had occasion to observe with much care the official relations—and I know of no other—between Charles II. and Governor Leverett the six years the latter was governor. At no time in this period was there anything but antagonism between them. The act of the Governor in the spring of 1675 in dispossessing the Dutch of Acadia, and thereby endangering the Peace of Westminster, was a matter for which he was under censure for several years afterwards at the Court of Charles II.

In June, 1676, hardly three months before it is claimed he was knighted, he treated very curtly in Boston the bearer of a royal letter which he read in council, without even removing his hat, scornfully remarking at the end that its contents were of little consequence. All this was reported at Court about the time the royal letters patent are alleged to have been issued.

Gov. Leverett, as chief magistrate of the colony, is only surpassed by the amiable, prudent and accomplished Winthrop. As a military commander he had no equal during the first, nor perhaps during the second charter. His administration is a conspicuous one; and his memory has always been held in esteem and veneration in New England. That he ever held any other relations with Charles II. than those known to his contemporaries, none will believe who examine into the matter.

While I, as well as many others, am satisfied that he never was knighted by Charles II., as alleged, there are persons who believe otherwise, and continue to style him a knight, thereby making confusion in our history. I venture to suggest that this important question be referred to the Committee on Heraldry, with instructions to report their views at an early day.

Faithfully yours, C. W. TUTTLE.

To the Hon. Marshall P. Wilder, Pres't
N. E. Historic, Genealogical Society.

Mr. Tuttle, when he wrote the preceding letter, had not seen the original of the official letter which he refers to, though he had made diligent search for it. He relied entirely on the printed copies, which give a false impression. It is but recently that we have ascertained the owner of the original document. The letter belongs to Leverett Saltonstall, Esq., who has loaned it to the editor of the REGISTER. From it the following copy has been made by David Pulsifer, A.M. :

Charles R.

Trusty & Welbeloved, Wee greet you well. Whereas wee have been humbly informed by the petiçon of John Wampas *als* White, that he was about six months since put into prison here for a small debt, where he hath since remained to his utter ruine, & that he hath a certain parcell of land in Massachusetts bay, the which he hath held for many years, having taken the Oaths of Allegiance & Supremacy as our subject; and having humbly besought us to interpose With you, that he may bee restored to his s^d lands, or have liberty to sell the same for his present reliefe & the payment of his debts, Wee taking into our gracious consideraçon the miserable condition of the pet^r have thought fitt to reco^mend him to you, that he may have Justice done him & what favour the matter will fairly beare. And soe Wee bid you farewell. Given Att our Court att Whitehall the 22th day of August 1676 in the 28th yeare of our reigne

By his Ma^{ties} co^mmand.

WILLIAMSON.

[The letter fills one page of a folio foolscap sheet, and except the signatures of Charles II. and Secretary Williamson, is in the hand writing of a clerk. It is addressed, in the same hand writing, on the outside of the letter after it was folded:]

To Our Trusty and Welbeloved
S^r John Leveritt Kn^t governour
of Massachusetts bay in new
England

[Underneath the address is a line in another hand writing, probably a memorandum of the receipt of the letter by Gov. Leverett. A portion of the writing is obscure, but it looks like:]

Recd y^e 7th 2. jvān 1677

[Savage (Winthrop's New England, ii. 245) reads it, "Received 2 June 1677;" and the editors of the 32d volume of the Massachusetts Historical Collections (page 223) read it, "Received 2 Jan. 1677."]

This letter has been printed twice before, namely, in 1854, in the Massachusetts Historical Collections, vol. xxxii. page 223 ; and in 1856 in the Leverett Memorial, page 83 ; but in both copies the address is printed above the sign manual of the king, whereas in the original letter it is on the outside, and appears no where else.

Last year we sent a copy of Mr. Tuttle's letter to Col. Chester, of London, the eminent antiquary, and desired him to ascertain whether there was any record of the letter in England. The following reply was received :

124 Southwark Park Road,
London, S. E., England, 29 Sept. 1880.

Dear Mr. Dean,

I returned from the seaside last week, and have since looked into the matter about which you wrote on the 25th August. There was considerable difficulty in finding the document, as you gave no reference. It is in

“ Colonial Entry Books
Plantations General
Vol. 93. A.D. 1663-1684,”

at folio 150. It is undated, but follows a letter dated 29th March, 1676, and precedes one dated 14th Dec. 1676. This volume is only an Entry Book containing *copies* of letters written by Secretary Williamson. (See my Westminster Abbey Registers, p. 249.)

In the margin is :

“ To S^r John Leveritt gov^r of Massachusetts.”

At the end of the letter :

“ To our Tr. &c. S^r John Leveritt, Knt. gov^r of Massachusetts bay in New England.”

The explanation I would suggest is that Williamson was *notoriously a careless man*, and that this was one of his blunders. It seems absolutely certain that Leverett never was knighted, or there would be evidence of the fact in other quarters.

Sincerely yours,

JOS. L. CHESTER.

REPORT.*

THE Committee on Heraldry, to whom was referred the letter of Mr. Tuttle in the REGISTER for July, 1881, pp. 272-275, unanimously concurring in the opinion that the evidence is not sufficient to establish the affirmative, have requested the chairman to draw up their report.

We should do injustice to Mr. Tuttle and the society if we simply admitted the force of the reasons he assigns for his conclusion that Gov. Leverett was never made a knight. Such honors, if exclusively within the royal prerogative, have always been guarded by certain requisite formalities, rites and records. Though the rules were, no doubt, far less stringent and less respected two centuries ago than at present, no mere superscription on a letter upon another subject, and without the slightest reference to any such royal intent, would even then have been considered sufficiently formal for any such purpose. No other evidence is known to exist in this case, and we are all of a mind, that the address of the letter can be explained without the assumption that Leverett was ever made a knight.

The inquiry involves so much else that is interesting in our colonial annals, its consideration brings into review so many eventful incidents and historical personages important to bear in mind, would we appreciate aright the question or come to a just conclusion, that we ought to be greatly obliged to Mr. Tuttle for proposing its discussion. Diligent students of the past may have little to learn, but many among us are glad to improve every opportunity that offers to become better acquainted with what so nearly concerns us all. We have consequently, before stating the evidence and arguments bearing directly upon the points at issue, ventured to allude to the personal and family history of Leverett, to his public services and relations with the king. Leverett, as well as the remarkable men with whom he was associated in political life, reflects glory upon our infant state. If moving on a less conspicuous theatre they were many of them quite the equals in ability and character of the statesmen at home, more frequently mentioned on the historic page.

* New-England Historical and Genealogical Register for October, 1881, pages 345-356.

The more than twenty thousand Englishmen who escaped from civil and ecclesiastical thralldom under Stuart and Laud, to settle our New England plantations, fairly represented that better class they left behind them, which had recently produced for their more illustrious examples of character and ability, Shakspeare and Bacon, Raleigh and Sydney, and of whom were then in different stages and degrees of recognition or development, Eliot and Hampden, Hutchinson and Milton. The large number of the colonists who had enjoyed the advantages of collegiate education, or whose printed productions testified to a varied culture, the intellectual strength and scholarly attainments displayed in the colonial pulpit and practical sagacity in colonial affairs, indicated how well the seed had been winnowed which planted our American harvest. In a community knit so closely by common wants and perils, devout disciples of the same teachers, what was best in the select leavened the rest, and their leaders whom they preferred to positions of responsibility and trust, on whose sensible and conscientious exercise of their power the general welfare depended, were, as might have been expected, honest, prudent and able.

Winthrop, the gentleman and statesman, well expressed in his own happily constituted nature, the earnest convictions, and sense of dependence upon Providence, which braved the dangers of unknown seas and shores, and which alone could have sustained the hearts of his associates staunch as they were, amidst such manifold hardships and discouragements. The strong-hearted Dudley, fitly compounded to confront and overcome and inspire by his dauntless courage; Haynes, whose single year of gubernatorial service was followed by larger opportunities of usefulness in a neighboring colony; the noble and generous-minded Vane; Bellingham, and Endicott, all of whom shared with Winthrop while he lived the supreme magistracy, unlike as they were and much as they differed in their several claims to respect and confidence, reflected back the many toned shades of character of our puritan progenitors, who selected them for official dignity and duty. Winthrop, twelve years out of nineteen chosen to preside over the destinies of the infant settlement of Massachusetts, moulded and mirrored its prevailing characteristics during the first score of years.

From his death to 1672, when Leverett succeeded to the office, Endicott for fourteen years, Dudley for one, and Bellingham for nearly nine, alternately bore sway. Under Cromwell and the Protectorate, religious fervor, if intense and glowing as before, was not the more forbearing, and schis-

matics were even more cruelly persecuted. Nor did intolerance assume any milder or more cheering form for a long period after the restoration, for the saturnalia which ran riot in England, at deliverance from gloomy and unnatural asceticism, provoked simply disgust in a people whose respect for moral law was little tinctured with mercy. This reign of bigotry, to use the words of Savage, "between the mild wisdom of Winthrop and the tolerant dignity of Leverett, came to an end when the latter as acting governor" succeeded Bellingham, who died at the age of four score in office in 1672.

And who was Leverett, and what had he done to be selected for this responsible position? He had come to Boston, still in the freshness of youth, with his father in 1633. He had been in public employments under five of his seven predecessors, indeed under all except Haynes and Vane, and this long preamble and much that follows that might otherwise seem out of place, will serve to keep in mind the events and dates which might be referred to in arguing the probability or improbability of his having, at any period of his life, been knighted.

His father Thomas, 1585-1650, of a family for many centuries honorably established in Lincolnshire, married in 1610 Ann Fisher, in St. Botolphs in Boston, of which parish John Cotton became vicar two years later. For twenty years we are told that excellent pastor, though suspected of disobedience to ecclesiastical domination in doctrine and observance, retained his incumbency through the influence of the elder Leverett with officials of the ecclesiastical courts, one of the proctors of which was his friend. When later the uncompromising conscientiousness of the puritan divine provoked the ill will of a parishioner, who denounced him to the authorities for administering the sacrament to communicants standing instead of kneeling, Leverett again exerted his influence at court to avert the danger. But Lord Dorset, not a very creditable personage, informed Mr. Cotton that if he had been guilty of drunkenness, or yet much graver fault, he might have obtained his pardon, but as he was guilty of puritanism and nonconformity, his crime was unpardonable, and therefore he advised him to flee for his safety. Cotton had already been invited to become the colleague of John Wilson in the new plantation on Massachusetts Bay, and leaving his beautiful church and the home so long endeared to him, with many friends from the neighborhood, he came to America in 1633. Thomas Leverett, resigning his office as alderman of Boston, accompanied his

pastor, Edmund Quincy, Edward Hutchinson the elder, and others of note, into exile. Not long before he had received with Mr. Beauchamp, kinsman of the Earl of Warwick, one of the company, a grant from the Plymouth Council of the Muscongus patent in Maine of "ten leagues square." It proved of no pecuniary advantage either to himself or his descendants for a century and a half, and then shorn of its grand proportions by trespassers and grants made from time to time to protect the rest, very little was left for even those who then indirectly represented the original proprietors, most of it having vested in the heirs of Brigadier Waldo when it became of any value.

If not destined to realize his expectations of territorial aggrandizement, the alderman and patentee was spared the hardships and solitudes of frontier life. He established himself in Boston, and here in honor and usefulness spent the remainder of his days. His residence lay next east of the first meeting-house, near the present corner of State and Congress Streets. His grounds in the rear adjoined Winthrop's, whose death and his own occurred almost within the same twelve-month. Not far to the west, on what is now Pemberton Square, then Sentry Hill, dwelt his friend and pastor Mr. Cotton. A ruling elder of the church, appointed in 1635, with Henry Vane and Thomas Oliver to settle all disputes, one of the leaders in the cause of education in establishing the first free school, for the six earliest years recording the municipal proceedings in which he took part as selectman, his experiences as alderman in the borough town of old Boston, were curiously and variously brought to bear in organizing public affairs in the new.

His son John, born in 1616, came with his father to America. From what is known of him later, his education had not been neglected. Soon after his marriage in 1639 with Hannah Hudson, he accompanied Edward Hutchinson, son of Ann, on a mission to Miantonomo, sachem of the Narragansetts, to ensure peace, which proved successful. He went in 1644 to England with Robert Sedgwick, who having belonged to the artillery company in London, had formed our own upon its model. Trained to arms under so accomplished a master, Leverett was prepared to take part in the turmoil that was then desolating the home country with fraternal strife. Both Sedgwick and himself took up arms for the parliament, Leverett having a command in Rainsborrow's cavalry regiment, in which service he gained experience and some renown. The loss of his wife July 7, 1646, three

months after the birth of his fourth child John, led the following year to his marriage with Sarah Sedgwick, and three years later he lost his father.

The next year at the age of thirty-five began his legislative career. He was elected in 1651-52 one of the two representatives of Boston, part of the time presiding as Speaker. The favorable impression he made upon his associates in the house, may be surmised from the positions of trust with which they honored him. He was sent commissioner to reduce Maine to the jurisdiction of Massachusetts, and soon after employed to repress Gov. Stuyvesant, whose projected attack on the English settlements had become known to Cromwell. A force of five hundred men was raised for the purpose, but as they were embarking peace contracted between the two belligerents left them at liberty for some other enterprise, and Sedgwick and Leverett, at their great expense and after hard fighting, took possession for England of all the French possessions between the Kennebec and St. Lawrence. The country was restored by the treaty of Breda in 1664 to the French crown, much to the disadvantage of the English colonies, proving for a century longer a bone of contention.

While thus employed Leverett was selected to represent the colony in England, and when these and other tasks assigned him permitted, went over and remained six years. Upon his return in 1662, he was elected Major General of the colonial forces, and again in the legislature presided as Speaker, taking an active part in the debates and proceedings. For the next six years he had a seat in the Council, and after serving two years as deputy governor by general consent he succeeded the aged Bellingham, and was reëlected as long as he lived without opposition. His own death in 1679 made way for Bradstreet, the last of our governors under the colonial charter.

Leverett's administration fell on troubled times. Giving shelter to Goffe and Whalley had vexed the king, who eager for money to feed his extravagances and prodigality to worthless favorites, wished to raise a revenue from the colonies. The persecution of the Quakers, the coining of money, levy of imposts and of taxes on minors and strangers, the oath of allegiance exacted to the colony, though charges somewhat stale, and perhaps mere pretexts used to vacate the charter in 1685, were constant subjects of complaint against the colonial government. There were other offences, such as the attack on the Acadian forts and the Dutch, disturbing the

friendly relations with France, which created prejudice at court. The colony, if it had not helped to stir up the great rebellion, had openly taken sides with the parliament. It was still regarded as of doubtful allegiance, and its independent temper alarmed prerogative. King Philip possibly chose the opportunity which he did, from an impression that no great efforts would be made by Charles to defend his rebel dependency. All the documents preserved by the British government go to show that he sent Randolph here when he felt we were weakest, and Palfrey enlarges upon this point. We have diligently examined the reports of the various departments, which prove conclusively that Palfrey is correct, and agree with Mr. Tuttle's idea that the king did not favor us, or John Leverett as our representative. The condition of affairs requiring ability of the best and consummate tact for their guidance, Leverett, from his intimate acquaintance with the public men here and at court, his familiarity with affairs civil and military, the confidence he inspired by his honesty of purpose, dignified demeanor and pleasant ways, proved equal to the emergency. He wielded a ready pen; an address of his to the king elicited much commendation, as did also his correspondence, proclamations and other public documents. While defending firmly and with excellent judgment the chartered rights of the colony, his loyalty to the crown, expressed without reserve, and at the same time without taint of subserviency, skilfully averted controversies at critical moments which might have put those rights in jeopardy.

His military career in the parliamentary army in 1644, and his well known friendly relations with Cromwell, his independent course in the exercise of his official functions since his return to America in 1662, his dispossession of the Dutch of their settlements in Acadia in 1674 and 1675, may be considered powerful, if not conclusive arguments against the probability of his ever having received the distinction of knighthood. But whoever is familiar with that period, or many another in England's history under Tudor and Plantagenet, or with the annals of our race in other lands and ages, must recall numerous instances where invaluable services to crown or country remained without requital, and disaffection and demerit were as often quite forgotten where there was power to hurt or help, to be purchased by rank or gift.

There were, however, so many more honorable motives, creditable to them both, which might have actuated the king to knight Leverett, that it is fair to assume, were the conferring of this dignity a matter of serious

doubt, that the honor, whether conferred or tendered, or only contemplated, was intended as an appropriate acknowledgment of official worth or distinguished service. Sir William Berkeley, down to 1677 governor of Virginia, had already been knighted when he went there in 1641; and like honor was later conferred upon Phips, for recovering treasure, some years before his appointment as governor under the provincial charter.

It might be further urged in support of the theory that Leverett was actually knighted, that to have bestowed upon one thus eminent and influential, the representative of the crown in the colony, what honor there might be in knighthood, consisted with policy. The only known evidence, however, that it was so conferred is the letter, given in full in the number of the REGISTER above referred to, addressed by the king "to our trusty and well-beloved, Sir John Leverett knight governor of Massachusetts Bay in New England," in behalf of Wampas* an Indian chief imprisoned for debt in London, requesting that he might be restored to lands in Massachusetts of which he had been deprived. It is dated the 22d of August, 1676. The Indian war had then just ended in victory in some degree, owing to the wise measures of the governor, aided by Gookin, Winslow, Church and Appleton. Such valuable services well merited royal acknowledgment. Leverett had besides a claim on the national treasury for about four thousand pounds for expenditures in wresting from France the forts in Acadia. The Stuarts were ever more willing to draw freely from their fountain of honor titular distinctions to acquit their obligations whether for money disbursed or services rendered, than from their purse.

It would be difficult to believe that Williamson should have ordered this superscription by mistake, or that any one of his subordinates, without some specific direction, could have written it, were it not that he was a notoriously careless man. The king's sign manual to the letter being on the inside page, while the address, added later, was on the outside, there seems a strong presumption that he never saw it. He was as heedless as his sec-

* John Wampas was a petty sagamore of the Nipmucks. He conveyed a portion of his territory to settlers near the Connecticut line, reserving four miles square bounded on Mendon. His mother had possessions in Boston, part of which he inherited, and he himself owned two acres in the hay-fields there, besides an estate on which he resided, part of the site of St. Paul's Church, between Winter Street and Temple Place. It bounded west on the Common and east on Baker thirty-two feet, by Hudson Leverett, son of the governor, on the north, and by John Cross on the south, two hundred and ten. The property is now of great pecuniary value, and is one of our busiest centres of traffic; and two centuries ago must have been one of the pleasantest places of abode. Wampas is described in one of his conveyances as a seaman, no grade, if any he had, being specified.—Suff. Deeds, L. 5, 490; 5, 541; 8, 421; 10, 111; 16, 89. The deed of Wampas, 10, 111, June 2, 1677, confirms a conveyance of land near the training-field in Boston, which his wife Ann had made over to Joshua Hews and others. Probably the chief was then here, and his debt had been paid by Leverett in some other way.

retary. Lord Rochester described him as "unthinking Charles ruled by unthinking thee." Halifax said unthinkingness was one of his characteristics. Burnett completes the picture by writing, "He would sign papers without inquiring what they were about." The Duke of Buckingham said of the king and his brother, "The King could see things if he would, and the Duke if he could."

The letter seems to have long escaped attention. The first to mention it in print was Mr. Savage, who in his edition of Winthrop's Journal, note on page 245, vol. ii., pub. 1826, says in relation to Leverett :

"So much is generally known of this distinguished man, afterwards governor of Massachusetts, that I would willingly have permitted his name to pass without a note, had not a fact come to my knowledge, *of which no mention is to be found in any place*, and which was probably concealed by design. An original letter, 'given at our court at Whitehall the 22nd day of August, 1676, in the 28th year of our reign,' with the royal sign-manual and the royal seal *appendant*, signed by Secretary Williamson by his majesty's command, is preserved by one of the descendants, *addressed* to our trusty and well-beloved Sir John Leverett, Knight, Governor of Massachusetts-Bay, in New England.' Whether this honor of knighthood were kept secret by the puritan because he doubted of the stability of the government at home, from which it emanated, or because he was too nearly advanced to the other world to regard the vanities of this, or feared its publicity might render him less acceptable to his constituents, by whose suffrages he was annually elected, is perhaps not unworthy of conjecture. The letter is marked, 'received 2nd June, 1677,' *of course after the election, and the next year a different person was chosen.*"

The dignified character which the *appendant seal* gave to letters-patent and open documents of importance is wholly wanting in this.

Mr. Savage was usually careful, but in this instance his evident delight and surprise at what he supposed was a discovery of knighthood conferred upon the Governor, appeared to have led his thoughts away from the paper before him and even the history of the time, while he conjectured as to the Governor's reasons for keeping such a matter secret, and he does injustice to Governor Leverett in the imaginary motives for his secrecy, by saying he feared its publicity might render him less acceptable to his constituents, by whose suffrages he was annually elected; this, Mr. Savage imagines, may have caused the Governor to lose his position the next year, as this remark indicates: "The letter is marked 'received 2nd June, 1677,' *of course after the election, and the next year a different person was chosen.*" It would also imply that the secret was discovered before the next election.

Thirty-five years afterward Mr. Savage condensed his long note into the following sentence: "In August, 1676, the King knighted him by a special grant, and he had sense enough to keep *the letter* secret for his descendents."*

Meanwhile, in the British Museum he found Harleian MSS. 5801 and

* Gen. Dict., article Leverett.

5802, inscribed : " A Catalogue of Knights made, from the first year King Charles the II during all his reign, those of King James and King William and Mary, with their pedigrees collected by Peter Le Neve Rouge Croix Pursuivant," 1696. For this catalogue Le Neve was so careful to obtain the name and date of each knight's creation in order to make a list of precedence, that he entered all he found recorded, whether the fees had been paid or not. Mr. George W. Marshall, who edited the publication of this catalogue for the Harleian Society, when appealed to as to the probability of the Governor's having been made a knight by patent of the king, states in reply, " I don't know of an instance of his having done so. I think the presumption strongly against Gov. Leverett having been knighted." Col. Chester's opinion upon the subject, that it seems certain that Leverett was never knighted, has already appeared in the REGISTER for July.

To another inquiry at the British Museum, the following answer was received :

7 December, 1880.

There is no mention of knighthood of Sir John Leverett in Harl. MSS. 5801, nor is his name to be found in the Catalogue of Knights, 1690-1760, compiled by Francis Townsend, London, 1833. . . .

E. MAUNDE THOMPSON.

Pishey Thompson, in his history of Boston, p. 429, wrote that Leverett was knighted by Charles II. at the time of his restoration. Thompson had followed Savage, and is disproved by the fact that Leverett, in all the documents of that period, in the various committee meetings to which he was summoned, had only the title of Captain.

When the king put his hand to the license allowing Leverett to return in April, 1662, he would have had him styled knight if he had recently knighted him ; but it reads

" License to CAPT. John Leverett to go peaceably to his habitation in N. E. with his wife and children and servants in the Ship Society, John Peirse, Commander, WE being satisfied of the loyalty of the said John Leverett, particularly demonstrated by his forwardness in proclaiming Ourselves in the Said New England," &c. &c.

The only plausibility to the theory of asserting that knighthood was granted to him at that time, consisted in the fact that one of the best jokes of the period was that " His Majesty, having not hitherto found enough in honours and offices to satisfy his enemies, expects his loyal friends will stay till he be more able ; nevertheless, some unhappy wit, amongst other queries, scattered in a paper in the Privy Chamber, made one, whether it were not fit His Majesty should *pass an Act of Indemnity for his enemies, and Oblivion for his friends.*"*

* Papers of the Duke of Sutherland.

Weighing the probabilities, for that is all that is left us, we must not overlook the well known scene alluded to by Mr. Tuttle, in which Randolph played so discreditable a part. This turbulent and overbearing messenger from the king had arrived out in June, and when he delivered his official letters of complaint of infraction of the acts of navigation, and on other grounds, his manner, arrogant and disrespectful, gave offence. Leverett, indignant at this discourtesy to his council, to testify his displeasure kept his hat upon his head, and speedily dismissed him. An answer thanking the king for his gracious letter was, however, forthwith prepared and despatched by a vessel then in port ready to sail. It was not shown to Randolph, who was, however, invited to send despatches by the same ship if he pleased.

The next day, in a private interview, Randolph enforcing in strong phrase his objections against the colonial administration and violation of the acts of trade, Leverett boldly asserted the rights of the colony, and that his Majesty ought not to retrench but enlarge them, inasmuch as upon their own charge and without contribution from the crown they had made so large a plantation in the wilderness. Much else was said, probably on both sides, to provoke, and the Governor told Randolph that he regarded him not as the representative of the king, but of Mr. Mason. Charles was at that time seeking to purchase the Gorges and Mason claims in Maine and New Hampshire for his son the Duke of Monmouth, a purchase which, as regarded Maine, Massachusetts had also in view, and not long after effected for £1200. Randolph's reports home for the next few weeks, it may be urged, may have changed the king's mind as to the knighthood, if he had ever thought of it. It may further be urged that the courteous letter of June 14th, with tidings of Canonchet's capture and death, may have reached its destination, as the season was favorable for quick passages, before the letter of August 22d was written, and before Randolph's account of what had occurred to arouse displeasure had arrived. But it is clear that if all that had taken place in Boston, exaggerated by Randolph, was known to the king, who had many an old rankle against him besides, he would not have knighted Leverett.

All of the committee are not of a mind as to the possibility of a change of intention on the part of the king. Some of us think Randolph's reports home, dated June 17th, 1676, must have reached London in less than sixty days, and been known to the king when the letter of August 22 was writ-

ten. No circumstances have come to our knowledge to settle this point beyond controversy. But passages at that season were often protracted, and sixty days was not unprecedented.

The letter from the king reached Leverett, according to the memorandum on the back, possibly as early as Jan. 2, 1677.* It may have been delayed in its departure, or long on its way, as opportunities direct to Boston were not very frequent; but it is known that Wampas, June 2, 1677, confirmed his wife's conveyance to Hews of the estate near the training field.†

Another circumstance pointing strongly against the probability of Leverett's having been knighted, is derived from Sewall's Diary. Sewall loved titles, and in his diary as late as Oct. 18, 1687, after the arrival of Lady Andros, he referred to the news of Phips having been knighted, whose wife became Lady Phips, then he writes, "so have two ladies in town." He always styled Gov. Leverett's widow as Madam Leverett. This appears to prove that Mr. Savage was mistaken in supposing that a knowledge of the Governor's knighthood had ruined his political prospects; in fact Sewall would not have allowed such a matter to escape mention in his diary.

By the colonial records it appears that at a general court for elections, held at Boston 23d of May, 1677, John Leverett, Esq., was chosen governor for the year ensuing, and took his oath in open court; and in 1678, and again in 1679, in which year he died in office. Mr. Savage made his mistakes, but was generally careful to avoid them. His faith that Leverett was sufficiently knighted may have been weakened, but never abandoned. Drake, *History of Boston*, p. 289, 1856, states that Leverett was created, for his services in the parliamentary army in 1645, a knight and a baronet, but kept his title to himself, making no display of these honors. Pishey Thompson, in his *History of Old Boston in England*, before referred to, says that

* Mr. Savage gave the date indicating its reception, 2 June, 1677; the Massachusetts Historical Society printed it as 2 January, 1677; the endorsement is puzzling, being written in a cramped style with a great confusion of letters, characters representing contractions, and both Arabic and Roman notation; it may be "Recy^d 7 2 jvān 1677," which may mean, "Received this letter 7th day, 2d month April—4th year (of Leverett's administration) 1677."

It will be observed that April is the earliest of the three dates which the endorsement may be deciphered to mean, and that January, 1677, O. S., would be some seven months later than June, which would break the force of Mr. Tuttle's argument against Mr. Savage's supposition that the date of its reception was the month last named. It is quite possible that the letter may not have been forwarded for some time after it was written; or, again, that the Governor may have retained it some time before passing it over to Secretary Rawson for use before the council, whose records, in their executive capacity after the year 1657, are, unfortunately, not extant.

† The suggestion that the letter was entrusted to Wampas himself, whom it exclusively concerned, and that the delay in reaching its destination was occasioned by his not returning at once to America after receiving it into his keeping, was accepted by the committee as part of their report, but omitted in the Register through inadvertence. As one possible explanation of what appeared obscure or enigmatical, as regards the memorandum, it should be mentioned.

he was knighted by Charles the Second when he came to England at the restoration and was appointed an advocate of the colony, but that he never made use of his title, but concealed his knighthood from the public. These statements seem to be founded on conjectures to explain the address on the letter from the king ; but if, as would seem, not founded on any other ground for belief, are not to be relied on as authorities.

Upon the whole, the committee are of opinion, that the supposition that Governor Leverett was ever knighted is not established by any evidence known to the committee. There is nothing even plausible which can be found to give color to such a claim, and the evidence that the committee have obtained is totally against it.

In closing our report we should fail in due respect to the memory of the propounder of this interesting problem, if we passed without notice the event which has deprived the society of one of its most beloved members. Not without intimation that his life was seriously imperilled by disease, yet indulging the hope that he might long be spared to the historical brotherhood to complete the many important researches in which he was engaged, he has been taken away in the midst of his labors, in early manhood. His untiring industry, shrewd insight and comprehensive familiarity with all periods of New England history, his conscientious fidelity to historic truth and freedom from bias, gave promise of many precious contributions to historical literature, of an honored career which would have added to the laurels he had justly gained. Much as he had won of established reputation, and many and valued as were his publications, the graces of his character, his amiable disposition, generosity in imparting information, readiness to forego his own to further his associates in their historical projects, gave him an enviable place in their esteem and affection.

In passing such judgment as the circumstances admit upon what is not easy to explain in the question submitted, we recognize the kindly thought which called the attention of the society to an interesting period in our colonial development, less familiar than it deserves to be to students of our New England history.

THOMAS C. AMORY,
AUGUSTUS T. PERKINS,
ABNER C. GOODELL, Jr.
W. L. JEFFRIES,
JOHN COFFIN JONES BROWN.

REMARKS BY THE EDITOR OF THE REGISTER.

THE importance of this inquiry is obvious to all who appreciate accurate history. Gov. Leverett was a man of such public consequence in our early history that everything concerning his name and titles ought to rest on a sure foundation.

The story that he was a knight seems to have been first given to the public, in the year 1826, by the late Hon. James Savage, LL.D., in a footnote to his edition of Winthrop's New England, vol. ii. p. 245, which note is quoted in part in the preceding report. I have not found the story in print or manuscript before this date; and Mr. Savage himself states that he had found no previous mention of it. While editing Winthrop he was shown the letter referred to by the late Mr. Tuttle,* dated Aug. 22, 1676, in which Leverett is addressed as a knight. This letter was then owned by the Hon. Leverett Saltonstall, of Salem, Mass., who died in 1845. It now belongs to his son Leverett Saltonstall, Esq., of Boston, by whose permission it was printed in the last number of the REGISTER. Mr. Savage drew, from the fact that Leverett was addressed as "Sir" and "Knight" on a letter bearing the autograph of his sovereign, the inference that he was really a knight. He gives no other evidence, and he seems not to have stopped to inquire whether this address might not be, as it probably was, a blunder. If, however, he had known, what Mr. Tuttle discovered, that the titles on the address of this solitary letter, which address there is no reason to think the king ever saw, were not repeated in subsequent letters from the same source, I think I know him well enough to assert that he would have come to the same conclusion as Mr. Tuttle; and so would the best informed of those who have repeated the story.

Twenty-seven years later, in 1853, a revised edition of Winthrop's New England was issued. In the mean time, the editor, Mr. Savage, had visited England and had made extensive researches concerning American history

* Charles Wesley Tuttle, A.M., Ph.D., died in Boston, Saturday night, July 16, 1881, aged 51. The society loses in him an honored and efficient member, the REGISTER a learned and able contributor, and the editor a warm friend. I heartily join in the words of praise and regret at the close of the report of the Committee on Heraldry.

and genealogy there as well as in this country. Had he found a single fact confirmatory of the inference which he drew from Williamson's letter, can there be a doubt that when he came to revise his note for the second edition, he would have given the new evidence? But though he makes important changes in this and other notes, he adds no evidence on this point.

Zachariah Whitman in 1842 (*Hist. Anc. and Hon. Ar. Co.* p. 93), the Hon. Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, M.D., in 1850 (*REGISTER*, iv. p. 93), Samuel G. Drake, A.M., in 1853 (*Hist. Boston, Mass.*, p. 289), Pishey Thompson, in 1856 (*Hist. Boston, Eng.*, p. 429), and others, repeat the story; but none of these writers furnish additional evidence. Bancroft and Palfrey are silent on the subject. Mr. Drake places the knighting in the time of the commonwealth, and furnishes the Rev. Mr. Leverett (*Leverett Memorial*, p. 81) with his reason, namely, that he "cannot understand how one who was certainly opposed to the government of Charles II. should have been so much a favorite as to be knighted by him."

In 1856, the late Rev. Charles E. Leverett, A.M., of McPhersonville, S. C., published his "*Leverett Memorial*." On the title-page Gov. Leverett is styled "Sir John Leverett, Knt.," and this has already led many people to think his right to the title proved. In this book, referring to the knight-hood of his ancestor, Gov. Leverett, the author states: "The letter of creation, or a copy, we do not know which, is, or was, as we are informed by a son of the late John Leverett, Esq., of Windsor [Ct.], among his father's papers." Here is the first reference to letters of creation. As no copy of this letter has been produced, it ought to have little weight. It is possible, and we think it highly probable, that the document in the possession of Mr. Leverett of Windsor was a copy of the letter of Aug 22, 1676, which letter, by the way, the Rev. Mr. Leverett thinks "unimportant in itself" as evidence. People who knew little of the mode of creating a knight may have supposed that the mere addressing a person in writing as a knight, in a document bearing his sovereign's signature, would make him one; and so they may have called this document a "letter of creation."

In 1861 the third volume of Mr. Savage's *Genealogical Dictionary of New England* was published. In it he repeats the statement that Leverett was knighted, but adds, "by a special grant." Whether Mr. Savage gave credit to the statement quoted in the *Leverett Memorial* about a "letter of creation," or reasoned that since Leverett left England in 1662, and did not return, he could not after that date have been made a knight by

Charles II. in person, I will not attempt to decide. Letters patent of knighthood, however, were not common if in use at that time; and George W. Marshall, LL.D., F.S.A., of London, England, editor of "The Genealogist," who was entrusted by the Harleian Society with editing their edition of "Le Neve's Knights," writes me that he knows no instance of knighting by patent by Charles II.

Neither Hubbard, Mather nor Hutchinson mention or allude to the knighting of Leverett. These writers, as well as Sewall, referred to in the report, were in a position to have met with the story had it been believed by the family. The letter of Williamson, if known to the Governor's relatives, was probably known to be wrongly addressed. At least they made no parade of the document. Other writers before Savage are as silent on this subject as those we have named.

No person in New England was less in sympathy with Charles II. than Leverett, nor was there any one here with whom that monarch was less in sympathy. At the time of the alleged knighting, this antagonism, as stated in Mr. Tuttle's letter, was at its height. The confidential relations of Edward Randolph with the English government gave him a knowledge of all the transactions between Charles II. and the colony of Massachusetts. If the knighthood had been conferred, or even, as it has been suggested, contemplated, Randolph would have known it; and some allusion would be found in his voluminous correspondence with the home government, of which Mr. Tuttle had a copy. Particularly would this be so if the honor was slighted by Leverett. But no allusion to the matter, Mr. Tuttle informed me a few weeks before his death, is found in the correspondence.

Both Col. Chester and Mr. Marshall write me that they do not find the name of Leverett in any list of knights, and the testimony of Mr. Amory's correspondent, Mr. Thompson, is to the same effect. The names of all the New England men who are known to have been knighted are found in the printed lists, but not Leverett's.

The only evidence produced in favor of the story is, that Leverett is addressed as "Sir" and "Knight," on the letter of 1676, and that his grandson named a son Knight. These are facts. All the rest are surmises or assertions by people who lived from a century and a half to two centuries after the alleged knighting is said to have taken place. It is quite as likely that the christian name Knight was given for a relative or friend by the surname

Knight; but, if not, it proves little. The negative evidence on the question submitted is unusually abundant.

It is surprising that a story with so little foundation should have passed unchallenged so long. Mr. Drake, it is true, long ago expressed a doubt whether Charles II. would be likely to confer the honor. But if, as he suggested, Cromwell knighted Leverett, what was there to prevent the fact from being made public at the time? Leverett's name occurs frequently in Sainsbury's Calendars of Colonial State Papers, during the commonwealth, as well as subsequently, but he is never called Sir John. This evidence, however, was not accessible when Mr. Drake wrote.

The only solution of the problem submitted to the Committee on Heraldry that is free from difficulty is the one suggested by Mr. Tuttle and concurred in by Col. Chester, that the address was an error of Secretary Williamson or his clerk. It is not necessary to prove that the person who made the mistake was a careless man, for less excusable blunders, made by the most careful of men, can be cited. It is a fact however that Williamson was notoriously ill informed and careless. On Mr. Tuttle's theory everything is plain, on any other there are numberless difficulties in the way, a few only of which have been alluded to.

NOTE.

We append a list of the British orders of Knighthood.

GARTER—

Reigning sovereigns and princes,	20	
British subjects,	30	
		50

THISTLE OF SCOTLAND—

30

ST. PATRICK OF IRELAND—

25

BATH—

Military:

Grand cross,	50	
Knight commanders,	90	140

Companions without title, 602

Civil:

Grand cross,	22	
Knight commanders,	78	100

Companions, without title, 240

STAR OF INDIA—

Knight's grand commanders,	42	
Knight commanders,	73	115

Companions without title, 140

ST. MICHAELS AND ST. GEORGE—

Knight's grand cross,	35	
Knight commanders,	115	150

Companions, 180

1162 610

The order of the Indian Empire, Jan. 1, 1878, numbering 112 companions (25 *ex officio*), can hardly be regarded as an order of knighthood. Neither can the Imperial order of the Crown of India, instituted at the same time, numbering 42 ladies, both including many Indian dignitaries; nor the royal order of Victoria and Albert, for ladies exclusively, 1862, 4, 5, 1880, in four classes, the two last of British subjects. Possibly the sixth, or British Langue of the sovereign order of Saint John of Jerusalem, instituted in Palestine, A.D. 1118, revised in 1834 under powers derived from the continental

leagues, should be mentioned as in part an existing British order. Its roll consists of Knights Grand Cross, Knights Commanders, and Chevaliers.

Of the 610 Knights and 1162 Companions, more than two hundred are foreign potentates or princes, Hindoo rajahs and other officials or dignitaries of India or of the other dependencies of the British Empire, several of the orders having been expressly instituted to conciliate a more friendly feeling in them to the crown. No such policy was pursued or attempted here, perhaps from the conviction that it would have proved of no avail. In the sixteenth century it was tested in Ireland with indifferent success. Loyal chieftains were created earls, or barons, or knights. Jealousies and animosities thus engendered divided, and weakened, and facilitated subjection. Yet its main object, to reconcile the people to English rule, remained unaccomplished. When the Stuarts succeeded to the British throne, James I., on his progress to his new capital, knighted nearly two hundred of various pretentions, without discrimination; and as many as a thousand during his reign. Knighthood thus ceased to be a distinction. His grandson Charles II. conferred the intended honor upon such numbers of unworthy men as placed it beneath the aspiration of all who respected themselves. He endeavored to raise a revenue by reviving an ancient feudal rule, that all landholders of certain amounts of rental should apply for it and pay fees, or else fines. But the parliament interfered, and abolished this, as it also did away with many other feudal exactions and conditions which had outlived in the law, their purpose or observance.

During all this period, no systematic method of recording the exercise of the royal prerogative in conferring knighthood existed, but in the reign of George II. abuses and question led to reform. The usual precautions are now taken to guard against misapprehension and preserve evidence of what has again become an honor, as in the days of the crusades, of Cressy and Agincourt, of Chandos and Sydney; and which moreover now recognizes honorable achievement in civil service, in literary pursuits, science and art, or professional walks, equally with prowess and conduct in the field.

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